DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 385 271 IR 055 553

AUTHOR	Johnson, Debra Wilcox
TITLE	Evaluation of the Role of the State Library of Florida in Youth Services. Executive Summary.
INSTITUTION	Florida Dept. of State, Tallahassee. Div. of Library and Information Services.
PUB DATE	95
NOTE	14p.; For the full report, see IR 055 541.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Children; Library Planning; *Library Role; *Library Services; *Public Libraries; Users (Information); User Satisfaction (Information); Young Adults; *Youth Programs
IDENTIFIERS	*Florida State Library; Library Services and Construction Act

ABSTRACT

This executive summary reports on the findings from the State Library of Florida's "Evaluation of Statewide Youth Services Program" project. The project was designed to assist the State Library of Florida in developing a long-range plan for youth services and to link the public library effort to "Blueprint 2000," the Florida education goals, and the federal educate America Act: Goal 2000. In addition, the project provides a profile of the local public libraries' needs in youth services. This executive summary highlights findings from the data collection and the overall recommendations. Various data sources used are outlined: focus groups, questionnaires, State Library documents, and staff interviews. Highlights concerning the state of youth services in Florida public libraries are provided from data gathered from both the librarian and client (parents and caregivers, young adults, and children) focus groups. Questionnaire results highlights include: critical needs in youth services, youth statistics, collaborative activities, staffing, and access. Staff interviewees recommended various roles for the State Library: communicating; training; advocacy; networking; consulting; and collaborating. The following themes arose from both focus groups and questionnaires, and are summarized in this report: satisfaction and importance ratings; use of State Library services; ways the State Library can help; and priorities for the State Library of Florida. Nine general recommendations on State Library youth services and three recommendations related to the LSCA (Library Services and Construction Act) long-range plan are listed. (MAS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 385 271

Evaluation of the Role of the State Library of Florida in Youth Services

Executive Summary

Prepared for the Florida Department of State Division of Library and Information Services
by Debra Wilcox Johnson, Ph.D.
Johnson & Johnson Consulting

1995
Funded by
Library Services and Construction Act, Title I

IR055553

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S.S. WHittle

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Executive Summary

This executive summary reports on the findings from the State Library of Florida's "Evaluation of Statewide Youth Services Program" project. The project was designed to assist the State Library of Florida in developing a long-range plan for youth services and to link the public library effort to *Blueprint 2000*, the Florida education goals, and the federal Educate America Act: Goals 2000. In addition, the project provides a profile of the local public libraries' needs in youth services.

This project was conducted from June 1 to September 30, 1994. Debra Wilcox Johnson, Johnson & Johnson Consulting, was the evaluator for this project. Dr. Johnson worked with State Library of Florida staff throughout the project and most directly with Carole Fiore, Library Program Specialist.

Data Sources

Several sources of data were used to evaluate the state's current role in public library youth services and to develop a profile of Florida youth services. These sources included focus groups, questionnaires, State Library documents, and staff interviews.

Focus Groups

The State Library of Florida sponsored six focus groups for public librarians, three in July and three in August. A total of 64 librarians, representing youth services and administration from throughout the state, attended. In addition, one group of state-level agency staff met to discuss the role of the State Library in relation to other youth service efforts at the state level.

Each group discussed items in four main areas: current local priorities in youth services, the effect of the State Library efforts on local practice, strengths of the current State Library efforts, and areas of development for the State Library of Florida in youth services.

In addition to the librarian groups, five focus groups with library clients were conducted. These special interviews were conducted with one group of parents, two groups of young adults, one group of lower elementary school age children, and one group of upper elementary school age children. While the results from each group relate most specifically to the library hosting the interviews, the insights from users provide an important perspective on the picture of youth services in Florida libraries. The results are not atypical of what has been reported nationally.

Questionnaires

To further help document current local youth services, to evaluate the effectiveness of the State Library of Florida efforts, and to help establish future priorities, the focus group results were supplemented with three sets of questionnaires. These were administered to all library directors, designated children's librarians for each

library administrative unit, and a sample of branch youth services staff during the summer of 1994.

The response rate from library directors was 67.3%. The response rate from the children's coordinator for each system was similar, with 70.8% responding. The response rate for the sample of library branches was 68.9% (51 of 74 libraries). In addition to the sample, the same questionnaire was sent to known young adult librarians in the state. The results from these surveys parallel the findings in the other three surveys; no significant differences were found.

Report

The full version of the final report summarizes the findings about youth services needs and activities in local libraries and examines the role of the State Library in youth services. The LSCA long-range plan is evaluated and the library's role in the state's *Blueprint 2000* is outlined.

The final section includes the recommendations to the State Library of Florida about their role in youth services. This executive summary highlights findings from the data collection and the overall recommendations.

The section relating to *Blueprint 2000* is not included in this summary; it will be available as a separate publication.

Youth Services in Florida Public Libraries

One of the purposes of this evaluation project was to supply a picture of current needs in public library youth services. This "snapshot" documents Florida's interest in and delivery of youth services. Information used to create this picture comes from each of the three questionnaires, the focus groups with librarians, and five special focus groups with library clients.

Librarian Focus Groups

Librarians were asked early in the interviews to identify local priorities. Traditional emphases on children's programming and collection improvement were balanced with attention to outreach services and trying to reach young adults. Support issues such as staffing and cooperative activities were also highlighted by participants.

Interwoven with the discussion of local priorities was the identification of local needs in serving children and young adults. While unique local needs were raised, patterns emerged from the responses. These include the following:

- Concern about the effect of year-round schooling, especially on programming.
- The role of the public library as the school library for home schoolers.
- The difficulty of reaching the young adult population.
- Continuing need for better relationships between schools and other community agencies and the public library.
- The demand for outreach services and the need to balance these in relation to

those delivered at the library.

- The urgency in youth services to get on the information highway.
- The necessity of programming for older elementary school aged children.
- The value of better recruitment and training of staff.

Client Focus Groups

Five focus group interviews gathered the user perspective on library services and needs. While one should be cautious about overgeneralizing the results of these groups, the comments provide interesting insights into the concerns of library users and parallel concerns raised by the library community.

Parents and Caregivers

One group of parents and other caregivers was interviewed. Their concerns seemed to reflect those of the librarians in the other focus groups: the need to expose children to reading and storytelling, encouraging parents to read to their children and bring them to the library, skills of library staff, quality collections, and problems facing young adults. The prevailing theme in the interview was encouraging reading. There was a concern for parents who did not have the time or skills "to answer questions and open doors for children." It was felt that parents need education about the library and the importance of reading to their children.

Young adolescents (especially 11 to 15) seem to be left out in the entire community. Participants felt the library needs to be a partner in the community-wide effort to provide activities and space to reach this hard-to-reach group. Young adults were described as "under-represented" and "underserved." Time to take the children to the library was another concern, linked to the increasing number of working parents. This was translated by participants into a need to take the library out to the community.

Young Adults

Two groups of young adults were interviewed, representing the middle and high school grades. These young people clearly expressed a desire to be heard and a desire to be served by public libraries. These students were library users (or at least aware of the public library) with diverse interests. Interest in learning and expression in the arts were characteristic of these young adults. Overall, they described their communities—including libraries—as having ignored the needs of young adults. On the plus side, the participants seemed to appreciate that the library was taking the time to listen to their concerns through these interviews.

A number of issues were raised by the young adults. Among the most prevalent were the following.

- The need to have a "place to go" that is safe, welcoming, and trusting.
- Library collections for recreational use lacked an adequate range of materials to meet the diverse interests of young adults; music was mentioned specifically.
- While seen as better than school library collections, there was deep concern over the depth, currency, and quality of the collection that supports teens' school and independent learning.
- Improvement of the young adult

collection was a top priority for both groups.

- Access to computers and information in electronic forms was a high priority in both groups.
- Programming needed to be expanded and more meaningful for young adults; a broad list of topics was suggested, including those in the performing and literary arts.
- Library staff overall received mixed reviews, although there was consensus on the need for a designated young adult librarian "that gets out and reaches people."
- The image of the public library is not a good one with teens.
- Active publicity efforts are needed to reach the young adults; peer promotion and spreading information via the schools were two key suggestions.
- Young adults voluntarism was encouraged, as was a teen advisory committee for the library.

Children

Two groups of children were interviewed. One represented children going into second and third grades. The other group represented the upper elementary. These groups allowed the children an unusual opportunity to express themselves about the library, and express themselves they did! Participants openly offered ideas and opinions. In addition, all drew pictures of the library of the future.

Participants in the two groups revealed a wide range of interests and clearly were readers and library users. In this way they, of course, did not reflect all of the children in a given community. With that caveat in mind, however, the children provided an interesting snapshot of the public library. The results potentially confirm impressionistic information gathered by local librarians. The key themes that emerged were:

- Finding, reading, and checking out books topped the list of reasons why children came to the library.
- All reported sometimes being disappointed that they could not find materials in the collection; all wanted more books to choose from (and therefore larger children's areas).
- Incentives were appreciated by the children, though not instrumental in their decision to read or come to the library.
- Programs were cited as fun and interesting.
- The children used the library for information to support both their school work and independent interests.
- Staff received high marks, most often being described as "nice."
- Among these school-aged children a distinction was made between them and the "little kids" who were often disruptive; a desire for separate space was expressed.
- Children envisioned a future library where computers allowed books to be delivered with speed and provided audio information supported by holograms.
- The use of the library by children is clearly tied to the ability of parents and other caregivers to transport and/or accompany children to the library.

Questionnaires

Data were gathered from each of the three questionnaires regarding the status of youth services in Florida public libraries.

Critical Needs in Youth Services

Staffing and collections head the list of critical needs facing libraries in services to children. The directors and sample respondents listed staff as their top priority (33, n=63 and 25, n=45 respectively). A total of 35 children's librarians (n=69) made staff the second highest need in that category. Enhanced collections ranked first with children's librarians (38), and second for directors (28) and sample respondents (15). Other needs identified frequently were more space, funding, outreach services, and reaching non-users, and access to technology.

Across the three groups, the main theme regarding young adults seemed to be lack of resources for and activities in young adult services at the local level. Lack of designated YA staff tops the list of needs for all three groups, with it being reported by 33 directors (n=63), 24 children's librarians (n=68), and 20 sample respondents (n=48). Collections, programming, reaching teens, and space also ranked among the top needs in serving young adults, followed by access to technology and convincing decision-makers of the value of YA services.

Youth Statistics

Each library system was asked about their use of output measures. Over half reported non-use of output measures (39, 53.4%); 34 libraries do collect output measures. Of those libraries collecting output measures, the majority collected data in the programming (26) and materials use (24) categories. Third ranked was library use measures (19), followed by information services measures (15). Other management information also is limited for the majority of the libraries. Youth services staff have minimal access to input measures, including collection size, registered borrowers, and percentage of materials budget.

Collaborative Activities

Youth services staff in Florida libraries do reach out of the library to cooperate with other agencies and organizations serving youth. Among the children's librarians, 90.4% (n=73) said they collaborated with other agencies. Among the sample branch libraries, 87.8% (n=49) reported collaborative activities. Librarians identified a broad range of agencies and organizations as collaborators in local communities.

Staffing

Each administrative unit was asked for counts on staffing throughout the library system. Two or less staff were assigned to children's in 64.1% of the libraries (n=64). For young adult staffing, two or less people were assigned in 96.1% of the libraries reporting (n=51). No staff was assigned to young adult services in 56.9% of the libraries.

Among the children's librarians, a masters degree in library science was reported by 64.4% of the respondents (n=73). The larger the library, the more likely to have an MLS degreed children's specialist. Only twelve libraries reported MLS staff assigned to young adult services;

not all of these were full time. Over half of the respondents in the sample survey had MLS degrees, but were not necessarily exclusively youth services people.

Access

The majority of libraries offered library cards from birth for children with parental permission (51.5%, n=68). Age five or when able to sign their own names combined with parental permission was the next highest reported policy (27.9%). The vast majority required children to be teenagers prior to getting a library without parental permission (95.7%, n=69). Eighteen was the most commonly used age (30.4% of the libraries), followed by age 14 (23.2%) and age 13 (15.9%).

No age restrictions were placed on the use of collection by the majority of the libraries (53.0%, n=66). Of those with restrictions, most identified video collections as restricted (58.1%, n=31).

The Role of the State Library in Youth Services

Several sources of data were used to evaluate the state's current role in public library youth services and to identify priority areas for the State Library. These sources included focus groups, questionnaires, State Library documents, and staff interviews.

Focus Groups

Each of the focus groups discussed issues in three areas: the effect of the State Library efforts on local practice, strengths of the current State Library efforts, and areas of development for the State Library of Florida in youth services. Several themes emerged consistently among the six groups of librarians and one group of state-level program representatives.

- Respect for the quality and usefulness of the Florida Library Youth Program manual, workshops, and graphics.
- The continued need for training at all levels and on a diversity of topics.
- The difficulty of reaching the young adult population.
- The need for modeling networking and cooperation at the state level.
- The need for youth services to gain access to electronic networks and technology.
- Recognition of the quality of the youth services consulting, but a desire for more availability.
- A desire for a strong leadership role by the state to promote the value of youth services among library administrators, boards, and other decision makers.

- The need for better management information to make a case to administration and other decision makers.
- A preference for a better method of communicating among youth services people, especially to share ideas and avoid duplication of effort.

Roles for the State Library

As a way of summarizing the interview, each person was asked for a word or phrase that would describe the desired role or priority for the State Library of Florida in the youth services area. The descriptors suggest the following roles:

- **Communicating**, especially of information, trends, and what is happening in the local libraries. Other related ideas: information disseminator, the "big picture," information clearinghouse, awareness of national efforts, research on new things, and information transfer.
- **Training** on a variety of topics and for different staff levels.
- **Advocacy**, including publicity for youth services with decision makers (local and state), political clout, leadership, and advancing *Goals 2000*.
- **Networking**, including coordination and facilitation—the State Library as a switchboard.
- **Consulting** or as generally expressed, support. Related concepts included expertise, advice, available, looking for and identifying alternative funding sources, way to make the case for youth services, help with new things or services, for small libraries, inspirational, and reaching target groups.
- **Collaborating** at the state level with other agencies that serve young people, cross-agency cooperation, and state-level coalitions.

Less frequently mentioned were the roles of innovator, including testing of new approaches and models, and recruiter, working with library schools and aiding in the recruitment of MLS-degreed librarians in youth services.

In conclusion, the overall tone of the focus group interviews was positive toward the State Library of Florida's efforts, particularly with the summer (and now year-round) library programs, expertise of the current consultant, and quality of the training opportunities sponsored by the State Library. The desired State Library's role in the future continues in these areas, with expansion of activities in consulting and training and more focused attention on leadership and advocacy, communication, and state-level interagency cooperation. The interviews, when combined with the questionnaire results, show that the State Library is respected for its role in youth services.

Questionnaires

The focus group results were supplemented with three sets of questionnaires. The results parallel the themes that emerged from the focus groups and as such, serve as validation for those interviews. The data show consistent support for roles that emerged from the focus groups, but allow for a more quantitative ranking of the needs expressed by the Florida library community.

Satisfaction and Importance Ratings

Across all three groups of respondents, satisfaction ratings for the services of the State Library of Florida were well within the acceptable range. The scale ranged from not satisfied to completely satisfied. All three groups gave the highest marks to the summer library program (FLYP). Direct and the sample respondents each gave it an average rating of 4.9; children's librarians gave it a 4.6 average rating.

Director's gave the children's services workshops the next highest satisfaction ratings (4.6), followed by consulting (4.2), and young adult workshops (3.7). These somewhat lower ratings relate to the need for more of each of these services, rather than a statement about the quality of the workshops and consulting.

The children's librarians and the sample respondents departed slightly from the directors on the rest of their satisfaction ratings. They gave the next highest satisfaction ratings to consulting (4.5 and 4.4 respectively), followed by children's services workshops (4.1 and 4.3) and young adult workshops (3.4 and 3.6).

In order to help establish the value placed on the State Library of Florida's services, each group was asked about the importance of each of these items. The six-point scale ranged from not important to extremely important. The results in this section ran significantly higher than those obtained in the satisfaction questions. The lowest average rating was 4.8.

All three groups placed equal importance on the summer library program (FLYP) and children's services workshops. Directors gave both a 5.4 average rating, librarians a 5.3, and sample respondents a 5.4. Consulting ranked next in importance for directors (5.3) and children's librarians (5.1), followed by young adult workshops (5.0 average rating for both groups). The sample respondents ranked young adult workshops (5.1) higher than consulting (4.9).

Use of State Library Services

A few questions on the children's librarian and sample surveys addressed use of the State Library's youth services activities. The majority of children's librarians reported that they or their staff have attended a children's services workshop in the last three years (91.8%, n=73). In the sample, a similarly high participation rate was reported: 89.8% (n=49). The attendance at young adult services workshops was much lower, with 43.1% of the children's librarians attending (n=72) and only 35.4% of the sample attending (n=48). In light of the limited resources committed to young adult services locally, this is not a surprising figure.

Among children's librarians, over 90 percent report participating in FLYP, the summer library program (93.1%, n=72). In the branch sample group, 83.7% participate (n=49). Among those not participating, the main reason given is a system-wide decision to design a unique summer theme.

Ways the State Library Can Help

The focus of the answers here tended to relate to additional services the State Library could provide, although existing services also were mentioned. This was especially true for FLYP. To better meet

the challenges faced locally, all three groups overwhelmingly saw the State Library as a primary source of training of professional and support staff in youth services. The need for training received the highest number of mentions, over a third in each of the three groups.

Directors were more likely to cite funding as a critical role for the State Library. Consulting services/expertise received the next highest mentions, followed by leadership and advocacy, young adult activities, recruitment of qualified youth services librarians, and improved communication among youth services staff (e.g., newsletter, coordinated information sharing).

Children's librarians also rated additional funding and grant opportunities as the second most frequently, followed by leadership and advocacy. Other frequently cited services were consulting services and improved communication among youth services librarians. The sample respondents ranked funding and leadership equally as their second choice, followed by the FLYP and young adult activities.

Priorities for the State Library of Florida

The majority in all three groups chose training as their number one priority for the State Library. A total of 26 directors cited this service (n=44), 35 children's librarians (n=53), and 11 of the sample respondents (n=30). The other frequently mentioned priorities were: consulting services, FLYP, funding, leadership and advocacy, programming ideas and assistance, enhanced communication among youth services librarians, and technology.

The LSCA Plan for Library Service to Youth

The LSCA long-range plan for service to youth has as its primary objective "to achieve quality level public library service for children and young adults of all backgrounds and abilities throughout the state in all outlets of every library." While this study did not have comparative data, at this point in time there is evidence that the State Library of Florida has assisted local libraries in their efforts to reach this objective. As reported earlier in this summary, the efforts in training, programming (FLYP), and consulting have received positive ratings by local libraries. In addition, grants awarded directly to local libraries help the State Library meet some of the intermediate objectives stated for this goal. Grants awarded for state-wide youth service activities have been linked to this goal. In addition, local library decisions, efforts, and funding help move the state in the directions specified in this plan.

The basic LSCA plan for library services to youth has been in place for over a decade, although it has regularly been reviewed and many changes have been made. As such, it has set a context for grants awarded in this category and more generally seems to serve as a long-range plan of service for the State Library of Florida. The current plan needs modification for two major reasons. One is simply that it is out of date and may not reflect current priorities. If LSCA is revamped (and then funded) at the federal level, this could coincide with the need for Florida to revise this segment of the LSCA long-range plan. The state's *Blueprint 2000*

is a major influence on that revision. The second reason for revision lies with the criteria used to evaluate progress on the long-range plan. In most cases, the criteria are outside the scope of the State Library of Florida's control and ability to regularly document. In order to document impact from LSCA-funded projects, the grant application and report process needs to place a high value on the planning and evaluation components.

While the LSCA plan is an important document, it raises another concern about the lack of a written long-range plan for the Bureau of Library Development in the youth services area. Without this plan, the LSCA plan serves as the surrogate. A clear statement of the role of the Florida State Library in youth services, irrespective of the LSCA priorities, would help guide the work of the staff working in youth services and staff dealing with related issues, such as library administration, technology, and training. An integrated Bureau plan would allow youth services issues and activities to be placed in the larger library context, rather than isolating them.

Recommendations to the State Library

The following recommendations grow out of the information gathering process used during this study. Each has its roots in the ideas and opinions of the librarians and users throughout the state. While not all the recommendations can be implemented immediately, progress on these recommendations can aid local library development in the youth services area. The State Library is not a surrogate for local library services, but carries out activities that lead to quality services throughout Florida public libraries.

General Recommendations on State Library Youth Services

1. Develop a long-range plan for youth services for the Bureau of Library Development that reflects current and future priorities.

2. Increase staff commitment in youth services by at least 20 hours per week.

3. Begin to integrate support for youth services activities currently funded by LSCA into the State Library's regular operating funds.

4. Aid the development of guidelines for youth services in public libraries as a companion piece to the public library standards.

5. In concert with the state Continuing Education Task Force, delineate the role of the State Library of Florida in training for youth services.

6. Issue a paper that articulates the public library role in Blueprint 2000.

7. Maintain, but do not expand, the current level of effort for the Florida Library Youth Program (FLYP).

8. Provide a direct communication tool for youth services staff in Florida.

9. Develop agreements and other collaborative activities with state-level agencies and other organizations working with youth.

Recommendations Related to the LSCA Long-Range Plan

1. Revise the current LSCA long-range plan.

2. Improve the evaluation component of the LSCA application and reporting processes.

3. Consolidate funding requests from the State Library of Florida for youth services into an annual omnibus proposal.

Made possible through a grant from
Library Services and Construction Act
and administered by the State Library of Florida

Division of Library and Information Services
Florida Department of State
Sandra B. Mortham
Secretary of State